

Testimony Before the Appropriations Committee
DMHAS BUDGET HEARING
February 24, 2022
H.B. No. 5307
William Acosta

Good evening Sen. Osten, Rep. Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is William Acosta, and I am a registered voter in the City of Bridgeport.

I am here to testify regarding the Governor's proposed budget for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

I serve as Housing and Advocacy Coordinator at Bridge House in Bridgeport, which is a psychosocial rehabilitation day program—or more commonly known as a Clubhouse—that serves adults, or clubhouse members, living with chronic mental health conditions.

My personal passion for this work comes from my own lived experience as the parent of two sons who have lifelong mental health conditions. I am also the son of a mother—now deceased—who had been diagnosed with a psychotic disorder. There is an intense personal emotional pain that comes with witnessing loved ones in despair—and as parents we cannot personally help our children. Truth is, not one of us is completely free of being at least relatively close to someone with a mental health condition and with a story to tell. But for me and many others, that translates into a relentless energy to serve daily and make a difference in the life of someone who might not otherwise be able to help him or herself.

Since becoming an employee of Bridge House in 2006, I have seen countless members very heavily rely on and benefitted from the employment, education, housing, involvement in local and state advocacy and becoming active voters, other programming and socialization supports that Bridge House gives the more than 200 currently active clubhouse members on a day-to-day basis. Day after day, Bridge House, and numerous other clubhouse programs like it across the state, have continued to provide a positive, encouraging environment that honors the value, the integrity, the respect, the honor that so many of our people living with mental health conditions so sorely deserve. And this in spite of the coronavirus pandemic that forced us to close in 2020 in order to keep everyone safe. We continued to connect with all members—be it by limited occupancy in our building, by telephone, by email, video on cell phones, Zoom video, etc. The people in the mental health community to whom we provide unyielding services and support every day, have earned much respect and honor against incredible odds. Yet they are so often discriminated against because of misperceived notions of how they will behave and “embarrass” the rest of us.

I appeal to your conscience, and I respectfully request that the funding for *mental health* programs be increased due the current historic mental health crisis.

Thank you again, madams chair and members of the committee.